IN THE CLAIMS

Please substitute the following amended claims for those currently pending:

1. (Currently Amended) A combination medical device comprising: a) a circular stapler instrument, comprising a staple cartridge component and corresponding anvil component, and b) ~~one or more portions of~~ a buttress ~~material~~ adapted to be a) stably positioned upon the staple cartridge and/or anvil components of the stapler prior to, or at the time of, use, b) while in position upon the stapler component(s), to then be delivered to a tissue site in combination with the stapler components, c) upon delivery of the components and positioned buttress ~~material portion(s)~~ to the tissue site, to provide a first region of buttress material to buttress a seam between tissue sections upon activation of the stapler instrument ~~as a staple line buttress seal between joined tissue sections upon activation of the stapler~~, and ~~optionally,~~ d) to permit the removal of one or more portions of ~~the~~ a second region ~~of the buttress material~~ upon activation of a stapler knife provided by the stapler, the second region being generally concentric to the first region and wherein the first region and the second region are formed of dissimilar materials.

2. (Currently Amended) The combination according to claim 1 wherein the ~~buttress material~~ first region comprises preformed animal tissue.

3. (Original) The combination according to claim 2 wherein the preformed animal tissue comprises pericardium.

4. (Original) The combination according to claim 3 wherein the pericardium has been formed by a process that includes the steps of forming the pericardium onto a mandrel or other model shape, soaking the formed pericardium in a crosslinking solution, removing the pericardium from the mandrel or other model shape, and sterilizing the pericardium.

5. (Currently Amended) The combination according to claim 1 wherein the buttress ~~material~~ is provided as a plurality of portions, including one portion adapted to fit the staple cartridge and another portion adapted to fit the anvil component.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Canceled)

8. (Currently Amended) The combination according to claim 1 [[7]], ~~wherein the second region is generally concentric to the first region,~~ the first and second regions cooperating to provide a desired three dimensional and/or topographic structure adapted to position and/or retain the buttress ~~materials~~ in place upon the respective stapler component.

9. (Canceled)

10. (Currently Amended) The combination according to claim 1[[9]] wherein the first region comprises animal tissue and the second region comprises a polymer.

11. (Original) The combination according to claim 9 wherein the first region comprises non-crosslinked, mammalian tissue.

12. (Currently Amended) A kit for use in a circular stapling procedure employing a circular stapler that comprises a staple cartridge component and a corresponding anvil component, the kit comprising ~~one or more portions of~~ a buttress ~~material~~ adapted to be a) stably positioned upon the staple cartridge and/or anvil components of the stapler prior to, or at the time of, use, b) while in position upon the stapler component(s), to then be delivered to a tissue site in combination with the stapler components, c) upon delivery of the components and positioned buttress ~~material portion(s)~~ to the tissue site, to provide a first region of buttress material to buttress a seam between tissue sections upon activation of the stapler instrument ~~as a staple line buttress seal between joined tissue sections upon activation of the stapler~~, and ~~optionally,~~ d) to permit the removal of one or more portions of ~~the~~ a second region ~~of the buttress material~~ upon activation of a stapler knife provided by the stapler, the second region being generally concentric to the first region and wherein the first region and the second region are formed of dissimilar materials.

13. (Currently Amended) The kit according to claim 12 wherein the ~~buttress material~~ first region comprises preformed animal tissue.

14. (Original) The kit according to claim 13 wherein the preformed animal tissue comprises pericardium.

15. (Original) The kit according to claim 14 wherein the pericardium has been formed by a process that includes the steps of forming the pericardium onto a mandrel or other model shape, soaking the formed pericardium in a crosslinking solution, removing the pericardium from the mandrel or other model shape, and sterilizing the pericardium.

16. (Currently Amended) The kit according to claim 12 wherein the buttress ~~material~~ is provided as a plurality of buttress ~~material~~ portions, including one portion adapted to fit the staple cartridge and another portion adapted to fit the anvil component.

17. (Canceled)

18. (Canceled)

19. (Currently Amended) The kit according to claim 12 [[18]], ~~wherein the second region is generally concentric to the first region,~~ the first and second regions cooperating to provide a desired three dimensional and/or topographic structure adapted to position and/or retain the buttress ~~materials~~ in place upon the respective stapler component.

20. (Canceled)

21. (Currently Amended) The kit according to claim 12 [20] wherein the first region comprises animal tissue and the second region comprises a polymer.

22. (Currently Amended) The kit according to claim 21 [[20]] wherein the first region comprises non-crosslinked, mammalian tissue.

23. (Currently Amended) A method of performing a surgical stapling procedure, the method comprising the steps of providing a combination according to claim 1, and employing the stapler and buttress ~~material~~ to provide a buttressed surgical seam between joined ~~abutting~~ tissue portions.

24. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 23 wherein the first region ~~buttress material~~ comprises preformed animal tissue.

25. (Original) The method according to claim 24 wherein the preformed animal tissue comprises pericardium.

26. (Original) The method according to claim 25 wherein the pericardium has been formed by a process that includes the steps of forming the pericardium onto a mandrel or other model shape, soaking the formed pericardium in a crosslinking solution, removing the pericardium from the mandrel or other model shape, and sterilizing the pericardium.

27. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 23 wherein the buttress is ~~material portions are~~ provided as a plurality of portions, including one portion adapted to fit the staple cartridge and another portion adapted to fit the anvil component.

28. (Canceled)

29. (Canceled)

30. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim [[23]] 12, ~~wherein the second region is generally concentric to the first region~~, the first and second regions cooperating to provide a desired three dimensional and/or topographic structure adapted to position and/or retain the buttress ~~materials~~ in place upon the respective stapler component.

31. (Canceled)

32. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 30 [[31]] wherein the first region comprises animal tissue and the second region comprises a polymer.

33. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 30 [[31]] wherein the first region comprises non-crosslinked, mammalian tissue.

34. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 23 wherein the buttressed surgical seam ~~between abutting tissue portions~~ is created without first binding said abutting tissue portions with one or more sutures.

35. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 23 [[28]] wherein one or more retaining rings are used to help retain the ~~abutting~~ tissue ~~portions~~ on the buttress ~~materials~~.

36. (Original) The method according to claim 35 further including the step of using a tissue push tool to place the one or more retaining rings.

37. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a buttress ~~material~~ for use in a kit according to claim 12, the method comprising the steps of treating the first region ~~buttress material~~ positioned upon a form of suitable size and shape to approximate that of a surgical stapler component.

38. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 37 wherein the ~~buttress material~~ first region comprises preformed animal tissue.

39. (Original) The method according to claim 38 wherein the preformed animal tissue comprises pericardium.

40. (Original) The method according to claim 39 wherein the pericardium has been formed by a process that includes the steps of forming the pericardium onto a mandrel or other model shape, soaking the formed pericardium in a crosslinking solution, removing the pericardium from the mandrel or other model shape, and sterilizing the pericardium.

41. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a buttress ~~material~~ portion for use in a kit according to claim 12, the method comprising the steps of preparing a plurality of portions, including one portion adapted to fit the staple cartridge and another portion adapted to fit the anvil component.

42. (Canceled)

43. (Canceled)

44. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 41 [[43]], ~~wherein~~ the ~~second region is generally concentric to the first region, the~~ first and second regions cooperating to provide a desired three dimensional and/or topographic structure adapted to position and/or retain the buttress ~~materials~~ in place upon the respective stapler component.

45. (Canceled)

46. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 44 [[45]] wherein the first region comprises animal tissue and the second region comprises a polymer.

47. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 46[[45]] wherein the first region comprises non-crosslinked, mammalian tissue.

48. (Original) The method according to claim 47 further including the step of attaching the first region to the second region by welding, friction, adherence, tacking, or tongue-in-groove attachment.

49. (Currently Amended) A circular stapler buttress ~~material~~ comprising a buttress ~~material~~ adapted to be a) stably positioned upon at least one stapler component of a circular stapler prior to, or at the time of, use, b) while in position upon the stapler component(s), to then be delivered to a tissue site in combination with the stapler component(s), c) upon delivery of the stapler components and positioned buttress ~~material~~ to the tissue site, to provide a first region of buttress material as a staple line buttress seal between joined tissue sections upon activation of the stapler, and ~~optionally,~~ d) to permit the removal of a second region of the buttress material upon activation of a stapler knife provided by the stapler, the second region being generally concentric to the first region and wherein the first region and the second region are formed of dissimilar materials and the second region comprises a frustoconical shape.

50. (Currently Amended) The circular stapler buttress ~~material~~ of claim 49, wherein the circular stapler buttress ~~material~~ is adapted to be stably positioned on a staple cartridge component.

51. (Currently Amended) The circular stapler buttress ~~material~~ of claim 49, wherein the circular stapler buttress ~~material~~ is adapted to be stably positioned on a staple anvil component.

52-56. (Canceled)

57. (Currently Amended) The circular stapler buttress ~~material~~ of claim 49 [[56]] wherein the first region comprises tissue in the form of sterilized pericardium, ~~and the second region is generally concentric to the first region,~~ the first and second regions cooperating to provide a desired three dimensional and/or topographic structure adapted to position and/or retain the buttress ~~material~~ upon the stapler cartridge component.

58. (Currently Amended) The circular stapler buttress ~~material~~ of claim 57 wherein the first and second regions are adapted to be separated upon activation of a stapler knife, in a manner sufficient to permit the separated first region to provide a buttressed surgical seam between ~~abutting~~ joined tissue portions and to permit the separated second region to be removed from the tissue site.

59. (New) The combination of claim 1, wherein the second region comprises a frustoconical shape.

60. (New) The combination of claim 59, wherein the cone of the frustoconical shape comprises a plurality of petals .